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SUBJECT: GOMA NOTES 03/17/08 - VISIT TO COB TONGO (MASISI  
TERRITORY)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Lack of reliable cartography doomed an effort March 17 to delineate an "exclusion" (buffer) zone between PARECO and CNDP at Tongo in Masisi Territory. MONUC committed to following up with a proper meeting in Goma, with maps at hand. Tongo is a sensitive point at the intersection of CNDP, FARDC, PARECO and FDLR zones of control; FDLR and/or PARECO conduct raids into CNDP-held areas. The village of Bambo (N/NE of Tongo) is a flashpoint. MONUC has established a Company Operating Base (COB) at Tongo and intends to do the same at Bambo. CNDP delegates expressed considerable indignation at being told that their plans to attack FDLR positions to the east and south-east of Tongo would be a cease-fire violation. COB Tongo has received ten CNDP or FDLR surrenders since February.

¶10. None seems to know much about what is going on. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) As part of the International Facilitation's ongoing effort to assist in the creation of "exclusion zones" in areas with high incidence of cease-fire violations, Jean-Michel Dumont and EUSEC Lt. Colonels Pecheux and Corvalan for the EU, USAID's Nicholas Jenks and Willet Weeks and MONUC's Colonel Narayan and Lt. Colonel Legendre traveled March 17 with representatives of PARECO and CNDP to MONUC Company Operational Base (COB) Tongo in Masisi Territory, manned by a South African company, Major Keso commanding.

¶3. (SBU) The effort to identify a workable exclusion area was considerably complicated by the COB's lack of usable maps showing key locations in their operational area, a situation that especially the EUSEC officers and Legendre found little short of astonishing. The South Africans had GPS coordinates for most -- but not all -- the locations they patrol, but had not yet plotted these. After over an hour of hard work and discussion with Major Keso and his staff sergeant in charge of intelligence, the group was able to come up with a rough sketch, but certainly nothing that would be adequate for the purpose at hand. Given the absence of reliable cartography, it was impossible to delineate, even on a preliminary basis, any kind of possible exclusion zone during the visit.

¶4. (SBU) Any effort to visit the nearby village was cut off by CNDP, which urged the Facilitation to go and interview the director of a school from which, according to UNICEF reports, children had been abducted to serve as child soldiers. The team could, CNDP said, speak to the school director and "determine the truth" for themselves. The Facilitation quickly pointed out that such investigations can only be done by professional organizations with proper mandates, and that anything of the sort was out of the remit of the Facilitation. Fear of further such bushwhacking kept them at the COB.

Key points made or reiterated during the visit

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15. (SBU) Tongo is a sensitive point. The COB is located in a farmhouse on the edge of the Masisi escarpment. CNDP is in control of the immediate surrounding highlands, FARDC holds territory downhill to the east, beginning at a point west of the town of Kalengera (location of another South African base). FDLR and/or PARECO are present to the northeast and conduct raids into CNDP-held areas within the COB's operational area. They have raided the localities of Murindi and Musereka repeatedly, apparently in connection with cattle theft.

16. (SBU) The village of Bambo (N/NE of Tongo), where there is a Thursday market attended by members of CNDP, FDLR, PARECO and FARDC, is a flashpoint. The COB patrols the area, and the plan is to place a COB there and demilitarize the market. The COB will be manned by a Senegalese unit which has yet to arrive in-country.

17. (SBU) CNDP has informed Kose that it intends to attack and take control of FDLR positions at Gagandu and Kibumba, to the east and southeast of Tongo. They claim that such an attack would be within the mandate of the recent UNSC resolution and would be justifiable following the expiration of the March 15 deadline for FDLR surrender. Kose says he has been very clear in telling CNDP that any such action would be a cease-fire violation and would be strictly prohibited. CNDP has no grounds for taking offensive action against FDLR, which is solely within the purview of joint FARDC-MONUC operations.

18. (SBU) CNDP delegates present expressed considerable indignation: how is it that even though the FDLR is not a signatory to the Goma accords, these somehow preclude CNDP action against FDLR? Although MONUC and the rest of the Facilitation insisted that this was indeed the case, the CNDP delegates were clearly unwilling to accept this interpretation. It is unclear whether the CNDP is actually planning offensive operations against FDLR or is simply trying to make the

KINSHASA 00000278 002 OF 002

point that it ought to be allowed to do so, a position it had also taken in a March 16 meeting with FARDC Deputy Chief of Staff General Gustave Amuli arranged by MONUC (septel).

19. (SBU) There have been ten surrenders to the COB since February 10, some with weapons: seven from CNDP requesting protection and DDR and three from FDLR requesting DRRR. COB staff questions the surrendering troops (none of them, in either group, seems to know much about what is going on), then transfers them to Rutshuru and eventually to Goma for DRRR or DDR. Surrenders usually occur over weekends, when the groups' vigilance is lowered. Surrendering personnel speak of others being caught, tortured and in some cases executed.

110. (SBU) Appropriately, the trip, which had begun with a short helicopter ride from Goma, ended (because bad weather made it impossible for a helicopter to return) in a long (three-hour), rattling, and wet drive back to Goma. There was no evidence of any armed presence (though the area is said to be under tight CNDP control) until a point four or five km outside of Kalengera, where the first FARDC patrols appeared. Villages on the CNDP side appeared mostly deserted. As the team was in a MONUC convoy, it was waved easily through all checkpoints (one reportedly CNDP, though operated as a civilian toll collection point, the others all FARDC).

Comment

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111. (SBU) Further discussions will be held within the next week in Goma, where detailed maps are supposedly available. An exclusion zone stretching from the present COB at Tongo and the proposed Senegalese base at Bambo would, along with the demilitarization of the Bambo market, be a good thing, everybody agreed -- in principle.  
End comment.

GARVELINK